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THE ERICHIM PLAIN

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The flattest and most fertile part of the Bulgarian territory is the Plovdiv plain, particularly its southwestern sections around Erichim village. This plain is famous for its abundant production of high quality fruit, grapes and vegetables, not only all over Bulgaria, but also abroad, far beyond the borders of the country.

The Erichim plain is located in the lowest part of the valleys of the Vuchka and Stara Reka rivers, which run from the western arms of the Rhodope to the Maritsa River. On the south it touches the steep slopes of the Rhodope, near Erichim village, and on the west it is bounded by the Benaparski hills, which are as high as 400 m in altitude. During the summer, these bare, yellow lime hills form a sharp contrast to the Erichim plain, covered with thick and abundant greenery. On the east the plain touches the low hills near historical Perushtitsa village, and on the north the plain widens out and merges as an inseparable part into the vast Plovdiv plain.

The greatest length of the Erichim plain, from Erichim village to the Erichim railroad station by the Maritsa River, is about 15 km. In the center, particularly around Hartovo Konare village, the plain narrows to 1 km, but is much wider at both its ends. From the foothills of the Rhodope mountains the plain widens to the west and merges with the small plain in the valley of the Stara River near Imperikhevo village which includes parts of the lands of Konarsko and Syaga villages, Pashtera Okoliya. The Erichim plain has an overall area of about 80 sq km. Its surface is entirely flat, and is slightly inclined

to the northwest, toward the Karakum River. Its altitude is about 300 m. The plain is covered with deposits from the Vacha and Stara Bzha Rivers. Here the soil is very fertile -- thick alluvial deposits, clay, and sand in places.

The Erichin plain is characterized by its warm sunny summer and comparatively mild winters. It faces the gorge of the Vacha River and has a good draft, which is favorable to the orchard trees. The average annual rainfall here is 400-500 lit per sq m, which is nowhere near sufficient. Droughts are particularly severe in summer. However, thanks to artificial irrigation which was particularly intensified during the years of the people's regime, droughts of the Erichin plain no longer affect its agricultural yield. Drought has been entirely conquered. A thick network of canals draws on the waters of the Vacha and Stara Bzha Rivers, and irrigates almost all the land of this fertile region.

The Erichin plain is densely populated. The largest settlements here are Erichin village (7,000 population), Erichin railroad station (over 6,000 people), and Kartene Hovare village (3,000 population). The entire plain here is under cultivation. There are no grazing grounds. The Erichin population is poorly supplied with arable land. There the national average is 42 decares of arable land per Bulgarian peasant family, while in this plain there are only 12 decares, respectively, i.e., 3.5 times less. About 2/3 of the land here belongs to the Farm Workers' Cooperatives, which are well run and are among the richest in the country. They have specialized in the production of fruit, grapes, and vegetables.

Thanks to artificial irrigation, abundant fertilizing, and the ever increasing introduction of modern agrotechnical means, the

cooperative farmers and private owners in the Erichim plain have high and stable agricultural yields. Here in large areas, 3 crops a year are harvested.

The main agricultural crops in the Erichim plain are fruit, grapes, and vegetables. In these fields the production experience of the population is very extensive, and the people's regime makes a good use of it.

Fruit growing takes first place in local agricultural production. In many settlements it accounts for half the total income of the population. Orchards occupy only 2% of the arable land in Bulgaria, while here they occupy 27%, and in the area of Kurtovo Konare village orchards account for 45% of the total cultivated area. Covering the entire Erichim plain, the orchards look like a real forest. If you travel by rail from the Erichim railroad station to Peshtera, you will cross vast new and old orchards near Kurtovo Konare, Neve Selo, Erichim, Isperikhovo, and Dyaga villages. Here everything is hidden by the thick forest of fruit trees. Abundant water bubbles along the numerous canals, irrigating orderly orchards, whose trees are heavy with fruit. At the sight of these vast orchards, one cannot fail to realize that this plain is indeed the orchard garden of Thracians.

The Erichim plain includes over 16,000 decares of orchard, and this represents more than the sum total of the orchards in the entire Khashevo Okrug, and equals 86% of the orchards in the Blagoevgrad Okrug. In density of fruit trees, the Erichim plain places high in comparison to other places in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian average is 126 decares of orchards per 1,000 persons, while this plain has 640 decares per 1,000, and in Kurtovo Konare village there are 740 decares, i.e., 2 decares for every 3 people.

The Krichim plain is a typical apple orchard. On a national average, only 20% of all orchards in the country are apple orchards, while here they are 80% of the total orchard area. The most common types of apples cultivated here are Ayvaniya, Kartovka, Slatna Simna Parmana, etc. Here orchards are cultivated by modern means, particularly in the Farm Workers Cooperatives. They are abundantly irrigated and fertilized, sprayed by special machines, and dusted with chemicals by airplane. One airplane can dust 3,000 decares of orchards daily, thus doing the work of about 1,500 workers.

The yields of the fruit growers of the Krichim plain are famous. Applying modern agrotechniques, they produce 3 to 5 tons of apples per decare. The champions in this field have obtained record yields. Thus, for instance, in 1962 in Kartovo Konare village, the average yield for 20 decares was 9,748 kg of apples per decare, and in Byaga village 2 decares yielded 13,000 kg each. The entire plain produces about 20 to 40 million kg of apples annually. The majority of this produce is exported, another part is consumed in the country, and a part is processed in the canning combine at Krichim railroad station.

In addition to apple orchards, the Krichim plain has also a small number of peach orchards (over 700 decares), cherry orchards (350 decares), and plum orchards. In the Bas (Burmavno semodelsko stepanstvo, State Farm) near Kartovo Konare village lemons and other subtropical fruits grow in greenhouses. The production of sour cherries and peaches must be increased in this part of the country, in view of the needs of the canning industry.

Here vine growing is also rather important, along with fruit growing. It is an old and important occupation of the population

parts of the plain. Vineyards cover vast areas of the Krichim plain. They take up about 20% of the arable land of the plain, while vineyards occupy on an average 3% of the arable land of the entire country. Here, under irrigation, they produce 4,000 kg of grapes per decare. Most of the grapes are dessert types, large and sweet, famous in home and foreign markets.

A third important agricultural branch in the Krichim plain is vegetable production. It is important for export purposes, and also supplies the canning industry with raw materials. The plain ranks among the best areas in Bulgaria in production of vegetables; in particular, of early tomatoes. It includes vast vegetable gardens. In the country as a whole vegetable gardens cover only 1% of the arable land, while here such gardens occupy 13% of the arable land, i.e., more than 7 times [sic] the country's average. A great quantity of tomatoes (mostly early) are grown in Kurtovo Konare village (1200 decares), at Krichim railroad station (over 800 decares), in Novo Selo village, Kadievo village, and others. Even the courtyards in the villages of the Krichim plain are planted with tomatoes, carefully cultivated. In this respect the people have great backlog of experience. The producers are being aided by scientific workers in the field of vegetable growing, and by wisely employing Soviet experience. Great results have been achieved through the culture of tomato seedlings which can withstand a temperature of even 0° C, can be transplanted to the field early, and produces early tomatoes. For example, in 1954, in the Kurtovo Konare village TRES (Trudovo nasledstvenno kooperativno stopanstvo, Farm Workers' Cooperative) plants cultivated in the ordinary way yielded an average of 2,820 kg of early tomatoes per decare and an income of 4,507 leva per decare, while plants grown by the cold

7,800 leva income per decade. Tomatoes are also grown in special hothouse pots. The Krichim plain and the other parts of the Plovdiv Ohaliya produce about 40% of the total yield of early tomatoes in Bulgaria. The production of red peppers of the Kapiya type, which are processed in the canning enterprises at the Krichim railroad station, is also well developed.

Fruit growing, vineyards, and vegetable growing entirely dominate agriculture in the Krichim plain. The other agricultural branches are poorly developed here, and fail to satisfy even the needs of the local population. For instance, grains occupy only 20% of the arable land here, but they are partly sown as second crops. Usually, after the early tomatoes are picked, the fields are planted with corn, which, under irrigation in fertilized areas, yields 200 to 300 kg of grain per decade. Industrial crops and livestock breeding are poorly developed.

The Krichim plain not only has a well developed agriculture, but also a developed industry. The most important industrial center here is the Krichim railroad station. It is a new settlement, grown up around the station itself. Until the first World War, there was nothing here but several small inns. In 1926 the population was only 224 people, and in 1934, 550. Later, due to the export and processing of vegetables, fruit, and grapes, the population grew rapidly. In 1943 the settlement (merged with the neighboring Polatovo village) numbered 3,200 people. However, the rapid growth of industry here resulted in a population increase to over 5,000 people, and in certain seasons of the year 2,000 additional workers come from Plovdiv, Pazardzhik, and the neighboring cities. Krichim is growing fast, and is looking more and more like a city.

The Erichim railroad station is one of the largest centers of the Bulgarian canning industry. After their nationalization, the canning enterprises which were established here between 1936 and 1943 were expanded and modernized, becoming the Vitamina State Canning Combine. It processes about 25,000 tons of vegetables annually, a large part of which are supplied in the Erichim plain. The combine produces tomato pulp, canned vegetables, jellies, preserves, sweet preserves, canned fruits, fruit juices, canned meat dishes, etc -- a total of about 100 different kinds.

The Erichim railroad station is an important wine production center. The Vinprom enterprise located here processes over 7,000 tons of grapes annually, and produces considerable quantities of liqueurs, wine distillation products, spirits, calcium tartrate, etc. A large modern wine cellar will be built here soon.

The Stefan Kiradzhiev Cellulose and Paper Combine is the newest and largest industrial enterprise at Erichim railroad station. It is the fruit of the vital Bulgarian-Soviet friendship, and is the only Bulgarian enterprise of its kind. Large quantities of wood pulp are processed, and cellulose is made here by using numerous chemical substances and the abundant water supply coming from close-by Karst springs. The cellulose is used in the production of natron type paper, from which a special factory makes paper bags for the transportation of chemical fertilizers, cement, flour, etc. In addition, the combine includes a factory for the extraction of tannates from the barks of oak, spruce, and other trees. These tannates have much use in the Bulgarian leather industry.

With its highly developed industry and its intensive agriculture, the Erichim plain is of great importance to Bulgaria. The high

quality fruit, grapes, and vegetables, fresh and canned, help to feed the Bulgarian working people. In addition, a large part of the produce of this plain goes to foreign markets -- the USSR, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Poland, Great Britain, and France. When, during the winter of 1955, I saw the numerous stills of the German Democratic Republic preserves, jellies, canned fruit, frozen strawberries, tomatoes, etc from Erichin, I was particularly proud of the degree of development of the Bulgarian canning industry, which is in large measure shown in the varied and high quality produce of the Erichin enterprises, located in the midst of one of the most fertile plains of Bulgaria.

FIGURE CAPTIONS

[Page 1 original] Sketch of the Erichin plain

[Page 2 original] Strawberry field in the Erichin plain

[Page 3 original] The "Vistamina" Canning Combine at the Erichin Railroad Station